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Lincoln Douglass Association
Newark

Twenty-five Years with the
LINCOLN-DOUGLASS MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION
of Newark and Vicinity

A Sketch by CARL BANNWART



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LINCOLN-DOUGLASS ASSOCIATION

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THE following officers of the Lincoln-Douglass Association, who with few changes in the membership have met together annually for half a decade to arrange for the successive celebrations of Lincoln's Birthday, have asked me to write a brief history of the Association on this its 25th Anniversary. This small offering is in compliance with the mandate of my colleagues on the committee.

The Lincoln-Douglass Memorial Committee comprises a group of Newark's colored and white representative citizens who have been holding a public meeting for the last twenty-five years in commemoration of the life and works of Abraham Lincoln. Twenty years ago, by unanimous consent, it was agreed to include the illustrious Frederick Douglass in all future exercises. Thus Lincoln's Birthday is set apart for the commemoration of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Each succeeding year these meetings have grown in public favor.

First a word about the statue and the sculptor. Our Lincoln Statue is the gift of Amos Van Horn. He bequeathed \$25,000 for its creation as a member of Lincoln Post, G. A. R. In other words, it was the fruition of what he felt for Abraham Lincoln when as a youth he was serving in the Union Army; when the boys who wore the blue gave thanks for a President like Abraham Lincoln. They endured the hardships of the battlefield willingly for a leader so human, so broad of vision and of such rugged honesty. His experiences of '61-'65 influenced him to make this gift forty years after. Ralph E. Lum was the leader as executor in selecting Gutzon Borglum to create the statue.

Amos Van Horn also designated the front of the Court House as the location for the statue. In the Essex County Court House the naturalized citizens make their declaration of loyalty and have bestowed upon them the priceless boon of American citizenship. He wanted these newly created citizens to look upon the stature of a full-sized American when they came to take their oath of loyalty.

As to the statue. It is cast in one piece. It was dedicated on Memorial Day 1911. Former President Theodore Roosevelt was the principal speaker at the unveiling. In the year 1912 President Taft placed a wreath upon it in the presence of a vast concourse of 20,000 people.

Beginning with 1912 I placed the City's wreath upon it personally on Lincoln's Birthday. In 1913, the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, it occurred to me to call together the colored ministers of the city and suggest Jubilee exercises in honor of the fifty years of Emancipation and the great Emancipator. The culmination of the service was to be the placing of a wreath upon the Lincoln statue.

Out of the several conferences held in the City Hall in January and February 1913 it was decided to conduct exercises around the statue on February 12th. That particular day was, I believe, the coldest in the history of Newark. Accordingly, we moved the meeting into the Court House on short notice. Thus was held the first of this series of celebrations, of which we hold the 25th today.

When we took stock the next year the committee decided to meet indoors hereafter. We selected the rotunda of the City Hall for the second meeting. The service was distinguished by good music, good attendance and fervid oratory.

The Third meeting place was the First Presbyterian Church. The Trustees of this most historic structure in Newark have freely granted us the privilege of meeting in this fine sanctuary. This church was for many years the civic center. Its nickname was "Town-clock Church." It holds as definite a relation to the great civic, social, religious and national movements of Newark as Faneuil Hall in Boston. These very walls have stood for 150 years. The great voices of the land have spoken from its rostrum, and the leaders of the city have worshipped in its pews. If your ears are properly attuned you may hear the echoes of the great gatherings of a bygone day as you commune with the interior of this church.

There is something most appropriate also in our meeting in this church. It is one of the oldest buildings of the city. The pastors of this church rang true in the days of the Revolution, so true that when Washington passed South through this city in flight, with Cornwallis and his army hot foot after him, it wasn't safe for Dr. McWhorter, the pastor who reared these walls, to remain here. As in the Revolutionary struggle, so in the great anti-slavery debate this pulpit thundered against slavery. Another point of appropriateness lies in the fact that in February, 1861, when Abraham Lincoln passed through the city on his way to his inauguration, he must have seen this very building in which we are gathered.

The statue of Lincoln has become a civic shrine. Ever since its dedication wreaths and garlands have been placed upon it on his birthday and other national holidays, expressive of the fervent veneration and love in which Lincoln is held by his countrymen. Some years a dozen great floral pieces have been placed upon it on his birthday, on Memorial Day, on July Fourth, on Armistice Day. These tributes were brought by G. A. R., Sons of G. A. R., Legion Posts, Masonic Fraternities, Elks and by the City of Newark. A great monument of this kind becomes the Mecca which devoted pilgrims visit. Poets and artists have come here and communed with the spirit of Lincoln. They gave their souls

a "time-exposure to beauty," they opened their hearts to an inspiring message from these pictured lips. I have often wondered how this same emotion of admiration expressed itself before the statue was erected, before it became the high altar of liberty and tolerance whereon they could "say it with flowers."

Listen to what the sculptor, Mr. Gutzon Borglum, said about the statue: In a letter written sometime after the dedication of the statue he said: ". . . I purposely, with malice aforethought, dramatized the soul of Lincoln. The strange position of the hands, the bent figure, the accented aloneness of him, were all premeditated. I was determined to try the experiment of creating a piece of museum sculpture for the public square, instead of the conventional monument, and see what happened; and I am pleased to say it has been a complete success. 'THE NEWARK LINCOLN' is probably the best liked statue of Lincoln in America, which means the world. . . . I judge from its many reproductions and the references constantly made to it."

I used the words civic shrine several times. But in some degree it is a national shrine. Let me quote a tribute to the statue by one who lived 300 miles from it and never saw it.

Miss Annie Johnson Flint, the author of the following poem, is an invalid—"shut-in." Her daily routine for three decades has been from the bed to the invalid chair, and even this short journey she cannot make unaided.

Notwithstanding her physical limitations all the lights of life burn brightly. Her mind is awake to the great thought currents of literature and art. Although she never saw the statue in its living, breathing reality, as we are privileged to see it, she grasped its meanings. With a mere picture of it and some words of description, here is how her soul responded to the statue:

THE CHILDREN'S MAN

There is a man in Newark Town
Whom all the children know;
Not mounted on a prancing steed
And stared at from below;
No haloed saint, remote, aloof,
In lonely niche apart,
With beauty that can charm the eye
But never touch the heart;
No knight in splendid armor clad,
With shining sword held high,
No statesman in a haughty pose
Aloft against the sky;
But just a plain and simple man
Who, weary, sits him down,
To rest awhile and muse awhile,
In pleasant Newark Town.
There is a man in Newark Town
Whom all the children love;

Not set on some great pedestal
His fellow men above;
But down among the things of earth
So human and so near,
With kindly eyes and face serene,
A friend and playmate dear.
They do not know he does not speak,
Nor do they greatly care;
They dust his hat, or gently brush
The snowflakes from his hair;
They put their arms about his neck,
And climb upon his knee,
They pat his cheeks and kiss his lips
In fond security.
He is not made of bronze to them,
Nor shaped to sculptor's plan;
He's flesh and blood and heart and soul,
Their own—the Children's Man.

—ANNIE JOHNSON FLINT.

Miss Flint's poem was brought to the attention of the Evening News and they published it on February 12, 1924. She wrote in the letter accompanying the poem: "This poem was written to give you pleasure as a small remembrance on your birthday. . . . It might most appropriately have its dedication to you who first brought the statue to my attention and told me of the sculptor. . . . The longer I know this statue the more it appeals to me—partly, perhaps, because of its difference from all others and the quality of simplicity."

We have held so many anniversary meetings in this beautiful auditorium of the Old First Church, being welcomed by the Trustees and Pastor of this historic sanctuary, that we feel at home here. On three occasions we were made welcome in the Church of the Redeemer. We express our collective thanks to the trustees of these churches for the favors of the years.

This twenty-fifth anniversary marks another change—an enlargement of the scope of these recurring celebrations. The City of Newark, through City Commissioner Pearce R. Franklin, is joined with us for the first time by a generous subvention, and thus the gathering today is under the joint auspices of the City of Newark and the Lincoln-Douglass Memorial Association. This partnership solemnized today in this service gives us a good start for the next twenty-five years.

As a part of the record it may interest some to know who the speakers were.

The Lincoln orators have been Dr. William Y. Chapman (1915), Charles G. Titsworth (1917), Mayor Charles P. Gillen (1919), Page M. Beverly (1920), Governor William N. Runyon (1921), former Governor E. C. Stokes (1923), Judge Van Dyke Joline (1924), Alexander Cairns (1925), Senator A. Harry Moore (1926), Dr. Lester H. Clee (1927), Dr. W. J. Dawson (1928), Senator Joseph G. Wolber (1929), Henry R. Rose (1930),

Dr. William Hiram Foulkes (1931), L. Hamilton Garner (1932), Dr. William R. Ward (1933), Dr. Lester H. Clee (1934), Dr. George Dawkins (1935), Carl Bannwart (1936), and, in anticipation, Walter L. Wright, President of Lincoln University.

The distinguished speakers who have extolled the character and labors of Frederick Douglass were Dr. Ernest Lyon, William A. Byrd, H. H. Proctor, Charles A. Tindley, Emory B. Smith, Marshall L. Shepard, Addie W. Hunton, Rev. Paziva O'Connell, Judge Edward W. Henry, William Lloyd Imes, W. E. B. DuBois, J. Leroy Jordan, Walter White, Frederick J. Handy, Nanny Burrows, Rev. Robert Bagnall, William Pickens, Rev. C. Frazier Miller and, today, Mrs. Mary Church Terrell.

The men who have helped this enterprise as Presidents for the past 25 years were Dr. L. B. Ellerson, Rev. Robert Brown, Rev. W. A. Hubbard, Dr. Thomas H. Wright and our present President, Rev. Louis H. Berry.

The men and women who have been officers were: H. J. Brown, Rev. Page Beverly, Rev. Louis H. Berry, Rev. D. L. Cosby, D. D., Mrs. E. Crampton, L. H. Dancy, Rev. L. B. Ellerson, A. W. S. Epps, Mrs. Grace Baxter Fenderson, B. C. Gordon, Mrs. Mary Eatman Gifford, Mrs. H. Blanche Harris, J. Everett Hale, Rev. W. A. Hubbard, W. H. Hollaway, Madam Alicia MacDonald, Rev. H. A. Onque, Thomas L. Puryear, Mrs. Henrietta Street, A. J. Scales, W. H. Simmons and Carl Bannwart.

But in addition to the officers we have had a faithful crew who labored with us to build up a commemoration of these birthdays in a way that might move many to emulation of Lincoln's fine qualities in civic righteousness and breadth of charity. The names enrolled on our programs who have thus helped the cause are given herewith: Dr. W. G. Alexander, William M. Ashby, C. M. Brown, Rev. R. D. Brown, H. J. Brown, Mrs. Pauline L. Baxter, Mr. Harry Brown, Rev. J. N. Burton, Chas. H. Clark, Divias Coleman, Mr. Smith Carter, J. E. Churchman, Jr., Dr. Divas Coleman, Rev. J. J. Derricks, Mrs. George Douglass, George A. Douglass, Rev. E. F. Eggleston, William Epps, Dr. W. R. Granger, Mrs. Granger, Mrs. M. B. Gregory, B. C. Gordon, Wesley Green, Dr. W. H. Green, Rev. W. A. Hubbard, James E. Henry, Rev. A. H. Hubbard, Rev. J. E. A. Johns, A. R. Jackson, Rev. R. C. Judkins, Miss Eva Mulford, Rev. J. H. McDavies, W. D. Mayo, Monroe Page, John S. Pinkman, Miss Josephine Pinyon, Rev. E. E. Ricks, Rev. J. R. Redd, J. C. Reddie, Mrs. Ada Ricks, R. W. Stewart, Mrs. W. J. Street, Rev. H. K. Spearman, J. M. Stoute, Dr. W. P. G. Urling, Dr. W. H. Washington, Mrs. W. W. Wolfe, Dr. W. W. Wolfe, Rev. C. T. Wilcher, D. D. Woody and Theodore S. Fettingner, who made very substantial contributions over a period of years. Among these also I would enroll Rodney V. Saylor, the distinguished and accommodating organist of this church.

There is also a goodly number who contributed their one talent, their five talents, or their ten talents from year to year in music, in gifts, in many services. And let me not forget the goodly host who swelled the audience and lent inspiration and gained benefit by their presence. We would remember them on this anniversary occasion, and thank them for building their loving cooperation into this series of meetings. There have been times when the church was comfortably filled. When we had nearly four hundred Boy and Girl Scouts in uniform at these services. The Boy Scout units came from as far as Harlem and Brooklyn. Bringing the youngsters from such distances it was necessary to provide a lunch for them. Accordingly, hot dogs, crullers, pie and coffee were served by our ladies' auxiliary. Reports have come that they have latterly staged their own parade and celebration in Harlem and Brooklyn after the pattern of this one.

In closing this sketch I desire to express my appreciation of the committee in affording me the privilege of sitting with these earnest and faithful souls who have extended to me the courtesy of saying a few words on behalf of our common enterprise at each meeting. I would also say a word for your leadership, the men and women who have stood by the ship these twenty-five years—how much I have appreciated them! These have proven themselves sound, mature, dependable. They avoid the radical, "lunatic fringe" and the conservative ice-bound inaction, but on a common middle ground of give and take advance the chariot of our better understanding and usher in a better day.

As the godfather of this baby I am proud of the lusty strength of the infant and interested in everything that will promote its growth and full development in our community.

This meeting is both a performance and a promise. It is an effort for both races to unite in tribute to the greatest man of the 19th century, and one who upheld his hands as Aaron supported Moses. We have distinguished speakers, and this assembly and these stirring songs give promise that the people of this city of both races will join us in increasing numbers through the years to extol from year to year the qualities which made Abraham Lincoln the best loved and the best known man of the century that is past. Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass were lovely in their lives and their souls are marching on together. Their cooperation was a type of that united effort which has characterized the history of the negro in this country; whenever white men have worked for a big thing colored men of force have worked shoulder to shoulder with them.